

# Camp Read-a-Rama® and Fully-Engaged Literacy Learning: Implications for LIS Education

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Literacy and literacy skill development remain critical concerns in the U.S. “Two of every three students in the U.S. do not have the necessary reading proficiencies to successfully complete grade-level work” (Allington, 2011). Camp Read-a-Rama, a summer day camp in South Carolina for 4- to 11-year-olds, creates innovative programming using children’s literature as the springboard for all camp activities. Activities connect with and reinforce concepts in children’s literature, thereby helping children learn to “live books” and understand connections between their reading and their lives. For six summers (2009–2014), Camp Read-a-Rama has provided fully-engaged, week-long themed literacy immersion experiences that seek to turn “summer slide” into “summer stride.” The purposes of this longitudinal, mixed methods study were: (1) to ascertain the impact of Camp Read-a-Rama’s interventions on helping children develop positive attitudes toward reading; and (2) to determine best practices for literacy skill programming with children in libraries and the communities libraries serve. Findings offer compelling evidence that strategies employed through Camp Read-a-Rama programming positively impacted children’s attitudes toward reading and their interactions with books, a critical step in literacy skill development and improvement. Analysis of parent/guardian evaluations revealed the following emerging themes as perceived impacts of Camp Read-a-Rama programming upon campers: increased love and enthusiasm for reading, improved reading and listening skills, and a belief that camp activities create a deeper understanding of books and vice versa. Findings suggest that integrating literacy skill instruction and programming into LIS curricula could better prepare librarians and LIS professionals to have a greater impact on literacy skill development among the children they serve.

**Keywords:** literacy, children’s literature, summer reading camps, Youth Services, libraries, LIS education

## Introduction

Maya Angelou once said, “Elimination of illiteracy is as serious an issue to our history as the abolition of slavery” (Angelou). Angelou’s comparison of illiteracy to slavery brings to the fore that those who fail to acquire reading and writing skills in childhood face far greater challenges throughout their lives

than those who excel at these skills from an early age. Hence, literacy and literacy skill development remain critical concerns because without literacy, children face a future replete with limits—educational, economic, social, and otherwise. Research suggests that developing a positive attitude toward reading and enthusiasm for reading are critical steps toward literacy skill development and improvement. For

example, Smith (1988) found that “the emotional response to reading . . . is the primary reason most readers read, and probably the primary reason most non-readers do not read” (p.177). Given the critical importance of attitudes in literacy skill development, this study seeks: (1) to ascertain the impact Camp Read-a-Rama has on helping children develop positive attitudes toward and enthusiasm for reading; and (2) to offer proven best practices for literacy skill programming with children in libraries and the communities libraries serve. The study also recommends integrating literacy skill instruction and programming into LIS curricula to better prepare librarians and LIS professionals to meet the literacy needs of the children they serve both in and outside of libraries.

## Literature Review

Many American children and youth lack the skills they need to function and contribute in today’s twenty-first century society—a society that requires them to be multiliterate. National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) scores indicate that “roughly one-third of U.S. students read at or above the proficient level, one-third read at the basic level, and one-third read at the below basic level” (Allington, 2011, p. 40). Numerous factors influence when and how easily children acquire literacy skills. Some of these include: race, ethnicity and socioeconomic status; access to books; ability or learning differences; family and community engagement, and participation in summer enrichment activities. Motivation to read can also impact literacy skill development. Because Camp Read-a-Rama focuses specifically on preventing and reversing summer reading loss, this literature review will concentrate on how race, ethnicity and socioeconomic status impact reading; summer reading loss and intervention programs; important elements of literacy skill development and maintenance; and family and community engagement.

## *Race, Ethnicity, and Socioeconomic Status*

According to Allington’s 2011 article “What At-Risk Readers Need,” “two of every three students in U.S. schools have reading proficiencies below the level needed to adequately do grade-level work” (p. 40). In 2015, only 36% of American fourth graders and 34% of eighth graders scored at or above the level of “Proficient” in reading (National Assessment of Educational Progress). African American, Hispanic, and Native American students lag far behind White students in reading achievement: 46% of White fourth graders read at the “Proficient” level in 2015, while only 18% of African American, 21% of Hispanic, and 21% of American Indian students read at this level. By eighth grade, 44% of White students read proficiently, contrasting with 16% of African American, 21% of Hispanic, and 22% of American Indian students who read proficiently (National Assessment of Educational Progress). Like the digital divide, this literacy achievement gap puts many non-White students at a clear disadvantage both in K-12 settings and in their level of preparedness for college-level work.

Alexander, Entwisle and Olson (2007) assert that children from economically disadvantaged backgrounds are more likely to lack reading proficiency. More specifically, Lee, Grigg and Donahue’s 2007 study found that “Eighth graders who were not eligible for free or reduced-priced lunch scored higher than those who were eligible, and those eligible for reduced-priced lunch scored higher than those eligible for free lunch” (p. 31). One reason that these students tend to have lower reading proficiency is that they “experience a decline in reading comprehension over the summer months, known as summer reading loss” (Kim & White, 2011, p. 64).

## *Summer Reading Loss and Intervention Programs*

Barbara Heyns’ 1978 book, *Summer*

*Learning and the Effect of Schooling* (1978), was one of the first works to establish the connection between academic achievement gaps and both family socioeconomic status (SES) and race/ethnicity. Heyns found that reading and achievement gaps increase more significantly over the summer months than they do during the school year. Since Heyns' publication, the correlations between summer reading loss and academic achievement or student learning outcomes have been continually affirmed, as have correlations between socioeconomic status, summer learning and academic achievement. While summer learning loss occurs for all students to a degree, students in lower socioeconomic groups experience greater losses than students in higher socioeconomic groups. Alexander, Entwistle and Olson (2007) used data from their Baltimore-based Beginning School Study (BSS) to examine the consequences of "seasonal learning differences" during the elementary school years for later learning and academic achievement. The study examined student achievement records and testing scores of then-9th grade students beginning when the students were in first grade. Findings indicated that the early years of schooling are foundational for students and ultimately determine the skills students will have to support all of their subsequent or later learning. Moreover, "Out-of-school experiences account for the majority of the achievement differences registered in the 9th grade, and these achievement differences, in turn, anticipate vastly-different high school placements, modes of high school exit, and patterns of post-secondary attendance" (Alexander *et al.*, 2007, p. 172). Because the Baltimore County Public School System (BCPSS) enrollment is largely low-income, the researchers consider socioeconomic rankings, "high SES" and "low SES," relative. However, achievement gaps by "high SES" students versus "low SES" students were alarming. Student records indicate:

sixty-two percent of high SES children were enrolled in a college preparatory

program in high school versus just 13 percent of the low SES group. There are large differences in high school non-completion and college attendance as well. Based on information covering the four years after the panel's on-time graduation in spring 1994, over a third of the low SES group and just three percent of the high group are 'permanent dropouts,' meaning dropouts who at approximately age 22 still lack high school certification of any type. Whereas almost 60 percent of the high SES group attended a four-year college by age 22, just 7 percent of the low SES youth did so (p. 171).

Benson and Borman (2010) established the significance of neighborhood social context for students' reading achievement levels at school entry and for reading achievement growth over the summer. Graham, McNamera, and Van Lankveld's (2011) Canadian study further supports the claim that summer vacations may create significant gaps in the learning cycle. The authors assert: "Such a gap may be particularly detrimental for vulnerable children such as those with lower academic achievement due to learning and language disabilities, lower socio-economic environments or learning in a language other than their native language" (Graham *et al.*, 2011, p. 575). Hence, summer learning loss is both disproportionate among socioeconomic groups, according to race and ethnicity, and contributes substantially to the achievement gap (McCombs *et al.*, 2011; Allington *et al.*, 2010, Kim & White, 2011).

### ***Important Elements of Literacy Skill Development and Maintenance***

1. Students should read books that are matched to their reading levels and interests. According to Allington and Gabriel, in successful reading programs, "Every child reads something he or she chooses." They further assert, "Students read more, understand more and are more likely to continue read-

- ing when they have the opportunity to choose what they read” (2012, p. 10). The experience of choosing in itself boosts motivation, and offering choice makes it more likely that every reader will be matched to a text that he or she can read well. In addition, students should receive reading instruction, and scaffolding should be employed to make sure that what children read they can read successfully. Allington and Gabriel (2012) note: “Reading at 98 percent or higher accuracy is essential for reading acceleration. Anything less slows the rate of improvement, and anything below 90 percent accuracy doesn’t improve reading ability at all” (p. 12).
2. Students should have access to a continuous supply of reading material and access to the texts of their choosing (Allington & Gabriel, 2012; Allington, *et al.*, 2010; Kim & White, 2011; McKool, 2007). In *Access for All: Closing the Book Gap for Children in Early Education* (2001), the authors offer rich evidence for the importance of young children having quality access to books. They write that children should have access to a large supply of books (300 or more by some counts) on a wide variety of topics and from various genres, and they should have an inviting space for reading. Furthermore, children need time to engage with books, and teachers and parents should ensure that children can discuss books with others and use books for fantasy play (Neuman, S., Celano, D. C., Greco, A., Shue, P., 2001). All of these elements contribute to children’s successful and positive engagement with books and reading.
  3. Students should be motivated to read, and adults should give them literary experiences that will enable them to discover the motivation that is unique to them. Students who are motivated to read achieve more than those who lack the motivation (Allington & Gabriel, 2012; McKool, 2007; Park, 2011). Furthermore, according to Park (2011), students who have intrinsic motivation to read read more and have greater success than those who are extrinsically motivated. Jim Trelease (2009), author of *The Read-Aloud Handbook*, further affirms that “Across the world, children who read the most, read the best. And that includes all social levels—rich or poor, urban or suburban” (n.p.). Trelease asserts that because humans seek pleasure, children must *like* reading to make a habit of it, and one of Trelease’s strongest recommendations for getting children to enjoy reading is: “Read aloud to them, even as infants,” and “As the child grows, so too does the time you should spend reading in one sitting, from a few minutes to at least 20 minutes, from picture books to chapter books” (n.p.). Applegate and Applegate (2010) challenge teachers to “take up the pursuit of thoughtful literacy” and not to equate reading only with literal recall but to engage students in lively discussion about books (p. 233). They conclude their paper, “A Study of Thoughtful Literacy and Motivation to Read,” by warning of the dangers of reading programs that teach students only to recall but not think about what they have read. These programs:
 

may succeed in producing sizeable numbers of children who appear technically proficient in reading. But if the children who pass through these programs are not engaged in thoughtful responses to what they read, we run the risk of producing huge numbers of children who see no use for reading in their lives. That illusion of educational success may come at a very high price indeed (p. 233).
  4. Adults should help students develop positive attitudes toward reading by engaging them with books and the en-

joyment of the narratives. Awaken the power of helping children think about what they read and stimulate their intellectual curiosity (Collins & Svensson, 2008). Research demonstrates that helping children think about what they read and stimulating their intellectual curiosity are powerful motivators for reading.

5. Combine activities and singing with reading. This helps children understand what they are reading. In her 2014 *Library Journal* article "Why Music Matters," Sarah Bayliss notes:

A growing body of research is affirming the central role of music in early literacy. Music has been proven to do everything from boosting numeracy to developing empathy among children; from improving speech-language delays to augmenting comprehension. One study from the Music-Science Lab at the Ben-Gurion University of the Negev showed that young children who played hand-clapping games had better cognitive and social skills than those who didn't (p. 20).

Bayliss also comments on the role music plays in developing the vocabularies of young children: "Songs introduce words they might not encounter somewhere else" (p. 20). Mother Goose on the Loose, Betsy Diamant-Cohen's award-winning musical storytime program for "one- to three-year-olds and their caregivers" that thousands of American libraries have adopted, incorporates "rhymes, songs, instruments, and puppets. The goal? To foster language, motor skills, and self-confidence" (Bayliss, 2012, p. 20). Hence, connecting reading with music and other means of interactive engagement helps children to learn and gives them positive associations with books and reading.

### ***Family and Community Engagement***

Family and community engagement

is cited as one of the single-most important factors in a child's literacy skill development. More specifically, Flouris and Buchanan (2004) found that parental involvement in a child's literacy practices has a more powerful impact than other family background variables, including socio-economic status (SES), family size, or parental educational attainment. Family engagement also largely determines language and emergent literacy (Bus, van Ijzendoorn & Pellegrini, 1995). Parental/Caregiver involvement with reading activities in the home has significant positive influences not only on reading achievement, language comprehension and expressive language skills (Gest, Freeman, Domitrovich & Welsh, 2004), but also on children's interest in reading, attitudes toward reading and attentiveness in the classroom (Rowe, 1991). Hence, when the Public Library Association (PLA) and the Association of Library Services to Children (ALSC), divisions of the American Library Association, examined the traditional approach of focusing on children in library storytimes, they realized that this was counterproductive. Parents/Guardians are the key to early literacy engagement; hence, they built their 2004 national initiative, ("Every Child Ready to Read") (ECCR), now in its second edition, around parent education ("Every Child Ready to Read"). PLA and ALSC "concluded that public libraries could have an even greater impact on early literacy through an approach that focused on educating parents and caregivers. If the primary adults in a child's life can learn more about the importance of early literacy and how to nurture pre-reading skills at home, the effect of library efforts can be multiplied many times" ("Every Child Ready to Read"). The program concentrates on five early literacy practices (stated in terms that any parent/guardian can understand): "singing, talking, reading, writing, and playing" ("Every Child Ready to Read"). Camp Read-a-Rama integrates all of these practices but also effectively erases dis-



ciplinary boundaries by making seamless and invisible activity transitions from art to music to writing to reading to crafts to swimming to movement to reading to science to puppetry to math to reading and more.

## **Program Background**

Camp Read-a-Rama, a summer day camp for 4- to 11-year olds, combines books and reading with interdisciplinary outdoor activities, educational fun, and traditional campcraft. The program immerses children in learning while simultaneously helping them develop and maintain literacy skills. Camp Read-a-Rama is directed by Dr. Michelle H. Martin, Professor and Augusta Baker Chair in University of South Carolina's School of Library and Information Science (SLIS) who holds a Ph.D. in English, specializing in Children's Literature, and Dr. Rachelle D. Washington, who holds a Ph.D. in English, specializing in Language and Literacy Education, specializing in English Language Arts and currently serves as the Executive Director of the Honors Program at Allen University in Columbia, South Carolina. Camp operated out of Clemson University from 2009 to 2011 and out of the University of South Carolina from 2012 to 2014. In September 2014, Read-a-Rama became a 501(c)(3) and in 2016 received federal trademarking. The camp is staffed primarily by college students and graduates who have participated in a Read-a-Rama service learning project and/or have studied college-level Children's or Young Adult literature in LIS, English, Education, or Art Departments. Each week of Camp Read-a-Rama has a theme and employs a literacy immersion approach to help readers—both reluctant and eager—gain new literacy skills and increase their interest in learning to read and in reading to learn. The program espouses a focus on “100% engagement 100% of the time” because (the second mantra) “Dead time will kill your program.”

Camp Read-a-Rama offers a plethora of opportunities each day for campers to interact positively with books—alone, with one another, with staff and/or with invited guest readers from the community. An hour and a quarter to an hour and a half daily of D.E.A.R. Time (Drop Everything and Read) replaces traditional rest time after mid-day lunch. A full-sized camping tent, known as the “reading tent,” is always pitched indoors during camp, and at appropriate times, campers can enter the tent, sans shoes, for reading or sharing books with others. During the remainder of the camp day, campers learn to “live books” through connecting the literature with songs, sign language, drama, movement, science, writing, games, arts and crafts, swimming, and more. The staff place children into activity groups on Monday that remain in place throughout the week; these groups always include a range of ages—which fosters close friendships between older and younger campers. Staff always place siblings and family members in different groups to encourage independence and new friendships. Age diversity within the groups facilitates opportunities for younger students to have mentors among the older campers and for older campers, whether enthusiastic, struggling, or reluctant readers, to read aloud to appreciative younger audiences, and gain reading confidence.

The structure of Camp Read-a-Rama emphasizes the goal of literacy immersion while it also builds leadership skills in the staff. During pre-camp training in early summer, which includes at least 40 hours of professional development, each staff member or staff pair plans approximately 15 hours of programming for a particular week. Those who plan the activities serve as “point people” for bringing to life the theme and the set of books selected for that week. There are several fixed daily activities: morning “Harambee time” (a Swahili word meaning “coming together”) when a staff or guest reads aloud to all of the campers; swimming several times per

week; and closing time at the end of the camp day, when another read-aloud takes place and campers get a sneak peek at the next day's activities. Each week campers take a theme-related field trip. These have included adventure walks, indoor rock climbing, water parks, hotel kitchens, and a university carillon bell tower. Other events include Family Literacy Night, when the campers present a program to their families that showcases the week's book(s) and what they have done and learned throughout that week. Family Literacy Nights also give staff and directors the opportunity to impart useful advice to parents/guardians about how to continue the excitement for reading that camp fosters. Below is an excerpt of the camp flier for Summer 2014.


Camp Read-a-Rama has been held at

various sites in Clemson (rural) and Columbia (urban), including a charter school, churches, university facilities, and a cabin in the woods. The directors have made a concerted effort to recruit site partners that would position Camp Read-a-Rama in communities with a high percentage of children most impacted by summer reading loss, and the camp directors and staff raise funds for "camperships" (scholarships) to enable children to attend camp who can do so only if provided financial assistance. As a result of these efforts, the enrollment for Camp Read-a-Rama has always been diverse, attracting attendees from a cross-section of the cities in which they have been held and from an array of racial, ethnic, familial, and socioeconomic backgrounds. The campers also represent diversity in reading ability and motivation.

# Camp Read-a-Rama

## Columbia

SUMMER 2014



Limit  
40 campers  
per week


**A day camp for children ages 4 to 11, Camp Read-a-Rama uses children's books as a springboard for all other camp activities. Each themed, book-centered week includes swimming, crafts, music, games and more. Every week turns summer slide into summer stride and Camp Read-a-Rama campers into life-long readers! Summer 2014 site partners are Church of the Apostles and Allen University.**

**June 9-13**

### Bug Eyes, Bird Brains & Bat Wings!

Have you heard a Madagascar Hissing Roach hiss? Experience this and many other wonders of arthropods, vertebrates and some of our most (or least) favorite nocturnal predators. We'll venture outside for a critter scavenger hunt, make edible birds' nests, and learn about animal "attitudes" through reading Carmen Agra Deedy's *Martina the Beautiful Cockroach: A Cuban Folktale* and Paul Fleischman's *Joyful Noise: Poems for Two Voices*.

Location: Church of the Apostles, 1520 Bull Street, Columbia





**June 16-20**

### All Around Town

To explore our "famously hot" city, we'll take daily walking field trips and geocaching excursions to visit USC, Richland Library, the Columbia Museum of Art, and the public art of the city, among other destinations. Rita Williams-Garcia's *One Hot Summer* and Dinah Johnson's *All Around Town* will help us envision how kids of an earlier era once spent their summers, and we may get a visit from the picture book's author.

Location: Church of the Apostles, 1520 Bull Street, Columbia





**June 23-27**

### Splash-rageous! (Fills quickly!)

Walk on the wild side while we swim daily, splash in the spray of a fire truck, and get soaked at great places like Fort Jackson's Water Park. Frank Asch's picture book, *Water*, will help us explore water conservation and how we all fit into the water cycle while Jewel Parker Rhodes's *Hurricane Katrina* novel, *Ninth Ward*, will emphasize the destructive potential of water.

Location: Church of the Apostles, 1520 Bull Street, Columbia



Passionate readers readers who read far above grade level, reluctant readers, struggling readers, and readers who read far below grade level are all represented. Staff receive training in diversity, inclusion, and diverse children's literature as a part of their initial and ongoing professional development for Camp Read-a-Rama.

## **Method**

This study represents the first phase of a longitudinal research agenda initiated by the Read-a-Rama research team: (1) to explore both the short and long term impacts of Camp Read-a-Rama programming upon children's enthusiasm for and overall attitudes toward reading; (2) to use what we have learned from Camp Read-a-Rama to offer best practices for literacy skill programming with children in summer reading camps, schools, pre-schools and libraries as well as in the communities libraries serve. The study also suggests that integrating literacy skill instruction and programming into LIS curricula could better prepare librarians and LIS professionals to assume greater roles and make increased, measurable impacts upon literacy skill development among the children they serve. The study's longitudinal approach ensures opportunities to document continuing development and sustaining impacts of Camp Read-a-Rama on participants' enthusiasm for reading and literacy skill development.

## **Research Question**

For this study, the researchers examined the following as a primary research question:

RQ1: How does Camp Read-a-Rama programming impact campers' attitudes toward reading and literature?

## **Participants**

Participants included Camp Read-a-

Rama campers and their parents/guardians from summers 2012, 2013, and 2014. Of 169 parent respondents, 81% of their children attended camp one year; 13% attended two years, and 5.9% attended all three years the research was being conducted. It should be noted, however, that Camp Read-a-Rama has operated for five summers in Clemson and three summers in Columbia—with two summers of sites in both locales—and a few campers have attended camps in both Columbia and Clemson. The age of the campers ranged from 4 to 16 (since Counselors-in-Training are technically campers), but 16% of the total campers were four and five years old, 16% were six, 23.1% were seven, and 18.3% were eight. Hence, the largest portion of our campers came to us when they were acquiring basic literacy skills. Parent/Guardian and camper participants represent diverse cultural, racial, familial, socioeconomic, and educational backgrounds. Participants reside in urban, suburban, and rural cross sections of their communities. In total, Camp Read-a-Rama serves approximately 100 campers per summer, but 169 parents/guardians completed the research surveys over the three-year period.

## **Data Collection**

Pre- and post-surveys of the campers and their parents/guardians were combined with semi-structured interviews with parents/guardians. Pre-surveys were conducted at the beginning of each participant's Camp Read-a-Rama experience each summer. Post-surveys were conducted immediately following camp attendance each summer. In addition to the annual collection of pre- and post-surveys and completion of semi-structured interviews with parents/guardians, participant post-surveys and interviews with parents/guardians were repeated approximately six months after camp attendance in 2012. Communication with the many of the children and parents/guardians has been on-



going throughout all years of camp, since many campers also attend fall and spring Read-a-Rama events (1.5-hour long free programs at local public libraries) and holiday day camps each year.

### ***Data Analysis***

Qualitative data analysis of interviews with all participants was completed by generating transcripts from recordings. Using a Grounded Theory approach, the researchers then employed thematic development. We independently read and re-read transcripts from the interviews. Next, we independently coded the data until patterns and themes emerged. After each researcher completed coding, we compared the themes that developed from our individual analyses of the data. We discussed the themes and documented their frequency to reach a consensus on emerging themes. Quantitative portions of the study were analyzed using dependent samples analysis techniques to test for significant changes in attitude toward reading due to the Camp Read-a-Rama intervention. Content analysis was employed to analyze qualitative responses within the survey data; researchers verified correlations between independent raters. (See appendices A and B for samples of the camper and parent/guardian surveys.)

### ***Methodological Considerations/ Limitations***

There are several methodological considerations. First, Camp Read-a-Rama exists to make South Carolina a more literate state, one child and one book at a time. Participation in this research came secondary to campers' participation in camp as a fun and educational experience. Survey completion was integrated into the camp program at the beginning and end of each week. Availability of parents/guardians was limited at times. Campers' attendance was sometimes less than perfect because of conflicts with family summer vacations

and other commitments. As a result, the researchers were not always able to collect all data desired for this study. In addition, when age and/or reading level of a camper prevented the camper from being able to independently respond to the survey, one of the researchers read the questions aloud and recorded the camper's answers. Hence, the accuracy of the recording of the response depended on the researcher's ability to understand the child's answer—a variable that is eliminated for children who can answer the questions themselves. For this reason, the results presented in this essay will focus only on the parents' responses and not those of the children. In addition, while some parents/guardians completed both the survey and the follow-up interviews, some only completed one component or the other, which limited our ability to assess how parents felt their children's attitudes toward reading changed.

This study accomplished triangulation via comparative analysis of qualitative components with quantitative components. Trustworthiness of the qualitative components of the study was further established by recording, transcribing, and independently coding all communications with participants. The researchers, including the authors of this study and a graduate student, then coded and analyzed the data.

## **Findings and Results**

### ***Children's Attitudes Toward Reading***

In addressing how Camp Read-a-Rama impacts campers' attitudes toward reading and literature, the results of the study revealed that there was a statistically significant difference in pre- and post-parent surveys concerning campers' attitudes toward reading. In 2012, 26 parents/guardians responded to the pre-survey, 20 to the post-survey. Wilcoxon Signed Rank Tests, used for comparing samples to assess how their means compare, revealed a *P* value of 0.317, indicating the difference in the median scores between pre- and post-surveys.

In 2013, 39 parents/guardians responded to the pre-survey, 40 to the post-survey. The resulting  $P$  value was 1.000. In 2014, 72 respondents completed the pre-survey, 53 completed the post-survey. The resulting  $P$  value was 0.007, indicating a statistically significant difference in the parents'/guardians' pre- and post-surveys in 2014. These results, combined with qualitative data, suggest that the improvement in campers' attitudes toward reading was a result of their participation in Camp Read-a-Rama. Figure 1 illustrates the comparison of the matched scores (responses of parents who completed both pre- and post-surveys), showing that in pre-surveys, 64.3% of parents felt that their children had a positive attitude toward reading, and in post-surveys, 67.1% of parents felt this way. Furthermore, when asked about their children's knowledge of books, 74.3% of parents in the pre-surveys vs. 75.5% in the post-surveys responded positively, indicating that parents felt their children's knowledge of books increased as a result of their participation in Camp Read-a-Rama (See Figure 1 and Table 1).

The number of parents who said their children felt reluctant or neutral about reading decreased between pre- and post-surveys. The question asked, "What is

Table 1. Parent/Guardians' Perceptions of Impact on Campers' Attitudes Toward Reading.

	Pre-participation Hopes	Post-participation Perceived Impacts
Enthusiasm for reading	64.3%	67.1%
Knowledge of books	74.3%	75.7%

your child's attitude toward reading?" and possible answers included: very enthusiastic, somewhat enthusiastic, neutral or reluctant. In the pre-survey, 4.5% indicated that their children felt reluctant about reading, but in post-surveys, this number decreased to 2.1%; 14.5% said their children felt neutral about reading in the pre surveys, while 9.5% said the same in the post-surveys. The histograms in Figure 2 illustrate this change (See Figure 2).

The decrease in the number of parents who said their children felt reluctant or neutral about reading is significant because as we have noted in the literature review, motivation to read and attitude toward reading strongly impact the acquisition and growth of literacy skills. We also note that 81% of parents said that their children felt "somewhat enthusiastic" or "very enthusiastic" about reading in pre-surveys, and the total of these answers increased in the post-survey responses to 88.5%. Hence, while Camp Read-a-Rama's literacy immersion approach helped reluctant readers become more positive about reading, it also contributed to those who already have a positive attitude toward reading become even more enthusiastic about reading (See Table 2).

Open-ended, qualitative parent/guardian responses from all three years of the study also point to the positive impact of Camp Read-a-Rama on children's attitudes toward reading. The following comments exemplify parental responses.

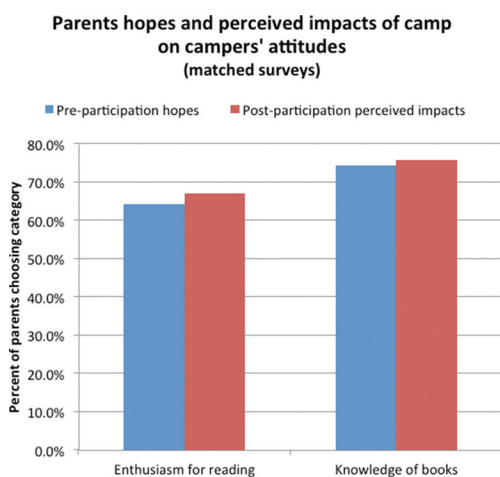
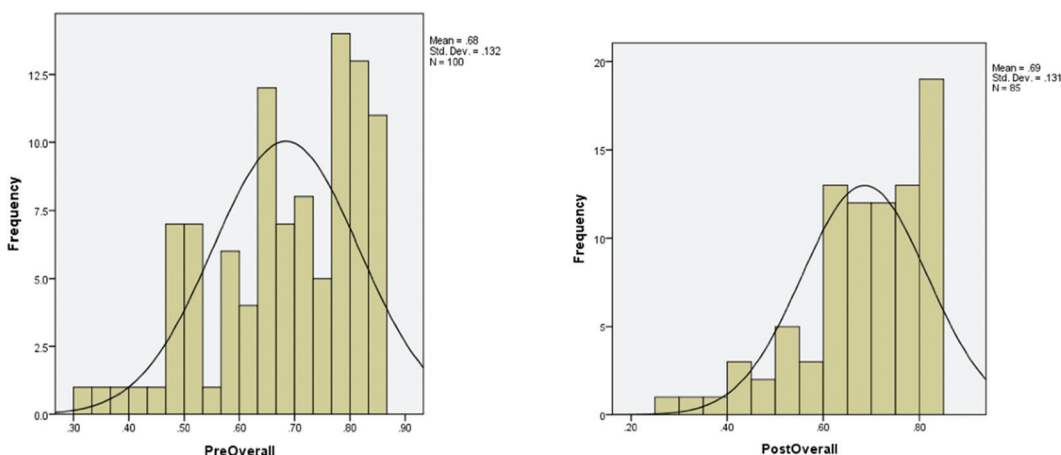


Figure 1. Parent/Guardians' Perceptions of Impact on Campers' Attitudes Toward Reading.



**Figure 2.** Parents' overall impressions of their children's attitudes toward reading. *Note:* 0 = most negative possible; 1 = most positive possible.

"He'll have positive feelings towards any camp he attends and will think more creatively, having experienced books through all 5 senses." Another parent noted: "Yes, he likes books whereas he thought it was a chore. Now he can't wait to read." A parent for whom English is not the family's first language remarked: "I hope she can enjoy books more and more, to be specific, English books. As you know, English is not her mother tongue, so this program will be a good opportunity for her to make progress in reading English books."

In follow-up surveys and interviews in December 2012 (6 months following camp attendance) and again in the summers of 2013 and 2014, parents/guardians cited numerous instances of once-reluctant readers not only loving to read but taking initiative within their own schools and social groups to initiate reading clubs with their friends, thereby creating their own communities of readers. Other children continue asking to arrive at school early or to depart late to visit the school library. Perhaps especially significant to these findings is that many of the children who: (1) experienced the greatest perceived gains in enthusiasm for reading as well as their motivation to read; and (2) initiated leadership roles of encouraging their peers to read belong to socially and economically prescribed "at-risk" populations. They are also among

the children who were the most reluctant or least enthusiastic about reading before beginning their Camp Read-a-Rama experience. Both quantitative and qualitative data support that the methods employed by Camp Read-a-Rama, which are built on strategies gleaned from literacy research, positively influence children's interactions with books and reading.

### Additional Impacts of Camp Read-a-Rama Programming

Camp Read-a-Rama integrates the arts, movement, swimming, games and various other activities into book-centered programming. Qualitative data from parent/guardian surveys revealed a perception that interdisciplinary and hands-on activities played an important role in helping their children develop greater enthusiasm for reading. A 2012 parent commented: "I think this is the most effective part of the program. By tying books with what the children are doing, it makes them [the books] become interesting and motivational," and another parent wrote that connecting books with activities will make his/her child "Realize that everything is centered around reading." A 2013 parent wrote: "It has emphasized for him how important reading is for all aspects of life" and another wrote: "I believe that the integra-

Table 2. Parents' Beliefs about Their Children's Attitudes Toward Reading, Pre-attitude and Post-attitude.

Pre-attitude				
	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cummulative Percent
Valid				
Reluctant	5	2.8	4.5	4.5
Neutral	16	9.0	14.5	19.1
Somewhat enthusiastic	39	22.0	35.5	54.5
Very enthusiastic	50	28.2	45.5	100.0
Total	<b>110</b>	<b>62.1</b>	<b>100.0</b>	
Missing				
System	67	37.9		
<b>Total</b>	<b>177</b>	<b>100.0</b>		
Post-attitude				
Valid				
Reluctant	2	1.1	2.1	2.1
Neutral	9	5.1	9.5	11.6
Somewhat enthusiastic	43	24.3	45.3	56.8
Very enthusiastic	41	23.2	43.2	100.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>95</b>	<b>53.7</b>	<b>100.0</b>	
Missing				
System	82	46.3		
<b>Total</b>	<b>177</b>	<b>100.0</b>		

tion of such activities will positively effect [sic] her reading and that she will engage in a meaningful learning experience.” Other 2014 comments included the following: “The integration of activities with reading has been positive; reading is fun when you have the right books and right environment”; “It can take kids on a journey in their minds and changes the way they look at things and think about things,” and “He has expanded what he thinks books can inspire people to do.” Others commented that camp helped their children see reading as a “fundamental,” “fun” factor that “impacts every other part of life.” These comments and the themes identified as constituting common threads throughout the three years of this study suggest that Camp Read-a-Rama’s full immersion ap-

proach works to get children excited about reading. As Collins and Svensson (2008) suggest, children who have a positive attitude toward reading and books develop literacy skills more easily (p. 82)

The coding of the qualitative questions in the parents/guardians surveys and interviews revealed the following themes concerning how Camp Read-a-Rama impacted their children’s literacy:

1. Improved reading and listening skills;
2. Increased reading fluency;
3. Social skill development;
4. Increased quantities of reading;
5. Increased variety in the subjects and genres children chose to read;
6. Improved ability to focus when reading.



## Essential Elements of Camp Read-a-Rama

After six summers of creating literacy immersion camps and integrating proven strategies from literacy research into Camp Read-a-Rama's programming, the following have emerged as elements essential to the success of the program:

1. *Superior staff*: Camp Read-a-Rama staff are well equipped to facilitate excellent programming both because they participate in intensive professional development at the beginning of the summer and throughout the camp season and because we strive to hire students and college graduates who understand fully-engaged programming. The staff is diverse (in terms of ability, culture, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and gender), and the majority come to us well versed in children's literature and in using books with children effectively. Those with less experience leave us well versed.
2. *Low staff-to-camper ratio*: Camp Read-a-Rama has maintained a 1 to 5 ratio for the youngest campers and no more than 1 to 7 for all campers. This not only ensures the safety of the program but it also helps establish close relationships between campers and staff. Though they do not count as adult coverage for campers, Counselors-in-Training (ages 14–17) provide additional hands for helping with campers while it gives them valuable leadership training.
3. *Diverse literature*: Campers always have available to them high quality and high interest literature. Each camp site keeps a dynamic on-site library that remains responsive to the needs and requests of the campers, staff and parents/guardians throughout the camp season.
4. *Diversity at all levels*: Camp Read-a-Rama fosters an accepting environment where campers interact with campers and adults of different ages,

racial and ethnic backgrounds, nationalities, sexual orientations, socioeconomic backgrounds, physical and cognitive abilities as well as those from different neighborhoods.

5. *Interdisciplinarity and creativity*: the staff strive to integrate innovative activities into the program that children would generally not do at home; the directors encourage staff to move beyond paper bag and paper plate crafts and not to be afraid of messy activities.
6. *Teaching children to "live books"*: we help children to connect everything they do with books and every book with something they do.
7. *Parental engagement*: during weekly Family Literacy Nights and through frequent communication with parents/guardians at the start and end of the camp, the staff and directors encourage continuing positive literacy practices at home. Of utmost importance is helping families to see reading as an integral part of everything they and their children do on a daily basis.
8. *Community engagement*: Camp Read-a-Rama has invited mayors, university presidents, university deans and directors, nurses, football, basketball and swim team members, librarians, teachers, parents/guardians and more to share books with the campers. This encourages campers to see that one never outgrows enjoying good books and that being a lifelong reader and a successful professional go hand in hand.

## The Future

The purpose of Camp Read-a-Rama is to improve literacy rates among young children. Camp Read-a-Rama has garnered a rather loyal following over the past six years, with many campers attending for multiple weeks and/or multiple summers; further research will investigate whether the campers who attend Camp Read-a-Rama for multiple weeks indicate a more

positive attitude toward reading than those who attend for only one week.

For the camp to be most effective, it must be replicable in new areas. We plan to expand the Camp Read-a-Rama program on a statewide and ultimately a nationwide level. By expanding the program, the camp can serve a greater need base, especially in cities with high populations of students with a low SES, a high rate of failure in school, and a high dropout rate. Camp Read-a-Rama's developers refine procedures and practices each summer and remain open to feedback from parents/guardians, campers, and staff to enable the program to better serve the educational and social needs of the children who attend. While this model could be used as an effective method for addressing summer reading loss in children from families with lower SES and minority children with limited access to summer enrichment programs, we also believe that all children can benefit from the approaches that Camp Read-a-Rama has honed over the past six years.

### **Importance of the Study and Implications for LIS Education**

Camp Read-a-Rama strives to prevent and reverse summer reading loss and increase reading motivation for students. Immersion strategies, whereby reading and reading aloud are combined with sing-alongs, performing arts, outdoor education, and interactive activities that relate to the books being read, are used to engage children and ignite a passion for reading. Ultimately, Camp Read-a-Rama seeks to have a lasting impact upon the campers' learning outcomes and their attitudes toward reading, literacy, and literature. This study lays a critical foundation for understanding the effectiveness of Camp Read-a-Rama and its programming and instructional approaches. In doing so, the study posits that Camp Read-a-Rama could be a model for literacy programming that combats summer reading loss. Furthermore, it may offer proven instructional methods

and strategies for school communities and libraries to employ with children and families in developing and improving literacy skills and fostering positive attitudes toward literacy. Librarians and others in the education arena have a common goal of providing learners with the skills they need to function as information literate individuals and as citizens who are fully prepared to contribute to the 21st century society.

Various LIS professional associations have a demonstrated role in both teaching and promoting literacy to children and youth. Just a few examples include: "Reach Out and Read," a program that trains pediatricians to use books both to assess the child's development and to encourage bonding between parent and child; and "Every Child Ready to Read," a partnership between the Public Library Association (PLA) and the Association of Library Services to Children (ALSC) that focuses on educating parents/guardians and caregivers about the roles that families can play in helping children develop early literacy skills. Through *Empowering Learners*, the most recent guidelines for school libraries, the American Association of School Librarians (AASL) identifies reading as a "foundational skill for learning, personal growth, and enjoyment" (AASL, 2009, para. 3). The Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) serves as one of the partners for "The Campaign for Grade-Level Reading," through which it is advocating for the "leveraging of museum and library resources in a nationwide effort to turn around a crisis in early learning, exposing children to reading and learning experiences in the critical early years and keeping them learning through the summer months" ("Campaign for grade-level reading," 2015, para. 1). Without question, these initiatives are making a positive impact. The magnitude of the literacy crisis is such, however, that in addition to their traditional library programming for families, librarians are increasingly being called upon to provide reading instruction

and related literacy support to children and families.

Reports from library employees and administration as well as LIS professionals across the nation present evidence of a strong need to provide librarians with the skills necessary to further support reading instruction for young library patrons. In the summer of 2013, the University of South Carolina's School of Library and Information Science and College of Education partnered with Richland Library, one of the largest library systems in South Carolina, to offer a Science of Reading Institute. The Institute was designed for public and school librarians, parents/guardians, reading tutors, and teachers wanting to enhance their skills for providing effective reading instruction to child beginning readers. Consisting of six 21/2-hour workshops, this Institute provided instruction and hands-on applications with the nuts and bolts of reading instruction. Sessions focused on phonemic awareness, alphabetic principles, automaticity, vocabulary development, comprehension, print concepts, assessment, access to print materials, and using assistive technologies to enhance instruction with struggling readers. Participants also gained experience with using culturally relevant texts and illustrations to aid learning. One hundred percent of the participants indicated that their knowledge of implementing literacy activities with young readers increased. Post-survey responses indicated that all participants gained a greater understanding of the importance of considering culture and background when helping children to select books. All also realized the importance of illustrations in literacy acquisition and gained resources for employing interventions for learning differences and disabilities, employing assistive technologies to aid learning and attending to the role family engagement plays in literacy. Outcomes of the Science of Reading Institute demonstrate the effectiveness of initiatives to help librarians further develop their skills with early literacy pro-

gramming (including reading instruction). These outcomes are also an essential piece of a call to action to offer pre-professional and continuing education opportunities for literacy skill instruction in LIS education.

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## Appendices—Surveys and Interview Questions

### *Appendix A: Sample Camper Survey*

#### **Camp Read-a-Rama Camper Pre-Survey**

Name:

Age & Grade:

1. Have you been to Camp Read-a-Rama before?  
☐ Yes  
☐ No  
If yes, how many summers?  
☐ My 2nd summer  
☐ My 3rd summer  
☐ My 4th summer
2. Can you read by yourself?  
☐ Yes  
☐ No  
☐ Almost
3. How do you feel about reading?  
☐ I love to read  
☐ I like reading ok  
☐ I hate to read
4. When other people read aloud to me  
☐ I love to listen  
☐ I like listening ok  
☐ It's boring

5. I think that reading and learning to read are
  - ☐ very important
  - ☐ kind of important
  - ☐ not very important
6. When I read I
  - ☐ think I'm good at it
  - ☐ think I'm ok at it
  - ☐ think I'm not good at it
7. For me reading is
  - ☐ very easy
  - ☐ kind of easy
  - ☐ kind of hard
  - ☐ very hard
8. My family believes that learning to read is
  - ☐ very important
  - ☐ kind of important
  - ☐ not very important
9. I think that libraries are
  - ☐ a great place to visit
  - ☐ an ok place to visit
  - ☐ a boring place to visit
10. When somebody gives me a book for a present, I am
  - ☐ very happy
  - ☐ kind of happy
  - ☐ unhappy
  - ☐ mad
11. How often do you read at home by yourself?
12. How often do you read at home with someone else? (List who you read with.)
13. What books have you read lately?
14. What do you like to read?
  - ☐ fiction picture books (not real)
  - ☐ non fiction picture books (real)
  - ☐ chapter books
  - ☐ magazines
  - ☐ poetry
  - ☐ graphic novels/comic books
  - ☐ other:

15. Where is your favorite place to read?

16. What is your favorite book?

***Appendix B: Sample Parent/Guardian Survey (pre and post are the same)***

**Camp Read-a-Rama Pre-Survey**

Parent's/Guardian's Name:

Child's Name:

Number of Children:

Child's Age & Grade:

Date:

Parent's/Guardian's level of education:

1. If your child has gone to other summer day camps before, what type of camps has he/she attended and for how many summers/weeks?
2. What was your child's attitude about returning to Camp Read-a-Rama this summer?
3. Is your child reading independently?
  - ☐ Yes
  - ☐ No
  - ☐ Not quite
4. What is your child's attitude toward reading?
  - ☐ very enthusiastic
  - ☐ somewhat enthusiastic
  - ☐ neutral
  - ☐ reluctant
5. Your child
  - ☐ reads very frequently
  - ☐ reads frequently
  - ☐ reads only when required
6. What is your child's attitude toward reading aloud to others?
  - ☐ very enthusiastic
  - ☐ somewhat enthusiastic
  - ☐ neutral
  - ☐ reluctant



7. What is your child's attitude toward being read aloud to by others?
- ☐ very enthusiastic  
☐ somewhat enthusiastic  
☐ neutral  
☐ reluctant
8. Your child believes that learning to read is
- ☐ very important  
☐ somewhat important  
☐ not very important
9. How would you describe your child's confidence level about reading?
- ☐ very high  
☐ high  
☐ somewhat high  
☐ somewhat low  
☐ low  
☐ confidence depends on the reading task and/or difficulty
10. For your child, reading is
- ☐ easy  
☐ somewhat easy  
☐ somewhat difficult  
☐ difficult  
☐ very difficult
11. Your family believes that learning to read is
- ☐ very important  
☐ somewhat important  
☐ not very important
12. Your child believes that libraries are
- ☐ a great place to visit  
☐ an ok place to visit  
☐ a boring place to visit
13. How does your child feel about receiving books as gifts?
- ☐ very enthusiastic  
☐ somewhat enthusiastic  
☐ neutral  
☐ disappointed
14. Which of the following do you feel has been impacted by your child's previous participation in Camp Read-a-Rama?
- ☐ Phonemic awareness (awareness of letters)  
☐ Enthusiasm for reading  
☐ Increased knowledge of new books  
☐ Willingness to read to/with others  
☐ Changes in the treatment or handling of books (physically)  
☐ Improved reading ability (hesitates/stops less)  
☐ Improved reading fluency  
☐ Attention span for reading or listening to books being read aloud
- Comments on any of the impacts above:
15. Would you recommend Camp Read-a-Rama to other families? If so, why? If not, why not?
16. Because Camp Read-a-Rama integrates the arts, movement, swimming, games and many other activities into book-centered programming, how do you feel the association of books with all of these other activities has impacted your child's attitude toward literature and reading?
17. What do you feel the long-term impact of your child's participation in Camp Read-a-Rama will be?

### ***Appendix C: Post-Camp Read-a-Rama Parent Interview Questions***

1. Your name(s):
2. Your child(ren)'s name(s) and age(s):
3. How many years have they attended Camp Read-da-Rama?
4. Can you describe the reason for sending them to camp?

5. Can you describe any changes in their attitudes toward reading you have noticed?
6. Can you describe any changes in their reading abilities?
7. Can you describe any other changes you have seen in them after they attended Camp Read-a-Rama?
8. Is there anything else you'd like to add?

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